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THE TRAGEDY OF HENGEST IN *BEOWULF*

At the great feast in Heorot celebrating Beowulf's victory over Grendel, once the present-giving was concluded, there came the *scop's* opportunity. Songs had been sung in Beowulf's praise earlier in the day: he had been compared to Sigemund and contrasted with Heremod; doubtless in the evening, too, there was a varied program (*gid oft wrecen*, 1065), but there was one song which the *Beowulf*-poet apparently regards as the *scop's* not inadequate response to the demands of a great opportunity. This song he summarizes at length in the *Beowulf* (1063-1160); it is now known, not altogether appropriately, as the *Finn Episode*. In addition to this there is a fragment of a spirited poem, surviving in a somewhat imperfect transcript by Hickes, which touches upon certain points of the same matter that is summarized in the *Beowulf*; this is known as the *Fight at Finnsburg* or the *Finnsburg Fragment*. Around these twin Memnones there has sprung up an exegesis so luxuriant that there is some danger, it may be, of choking altogether the song that made vocal the dawn of English poetry. Without this exegesis, some of it at any rate, there would be no getting on at all, but fortunately it is not necessary to carry it all with us on this present enterprise. Such excellent summaries of the whole matter have of late been published that the way-faring student may be trusted to find his own road.¹

In the present paper the privilege of newly interpreting any single line is expressly renounced; for every single reading adopted respectable scholarly authority could, I hope, be produced. Our immediate concern is to get at the story, if we can, which the *scop* told, helping ourselves to whatever in the literature of the subject will best advance us. So far as it is possible, I should like to enter

¹ W. W. Lawrence, *Beowulf and the Tragedy of Finnsburg*, *Pub. Mod. Lang. Ass'n.*, XXX, 2, 372-431 (1915); Fr. Klaeber, *Observations on the Finn Episode*, *Journal Eng. and Germ. Phil.*, XIV, 4, 544-549 (1915). There is much excellent matter in R. W. Chambers' notes to his revision of Wyatt's *Beowulf* (1914) and in his forthcoming *Introduction to Beowulf*, some of the material of which I have been able to examine through the good offices of Professor Lawrence. I have refrained from quoting directly any of this unpublished matter, and though I should have had frequently to disagree with Mr. Chambers' erudite and ingenious arguments, I may say that I have found them everywhere most suggestive and stimulating.

I quote the text of *Beowulf* from the Heyne-Schücking tenth edition, with a few changes in punctuation.

into the position of one hearing the poet of the Beowulf himself recite his summary of these events. Under such circumstances, using what knowledge we had, we should presumably try to understand what he was driving at. This seems a fair aim to pursue even now. It is evident that the poet counted heavily on the coöperation of his reader or hearer. He leads him on, plays a pretty game of hare and hounds with him, doubling back on his tracks, through half a dozen appositives. By sudden reticences, sly indirections, and swift changes of subject he contrives a sort of suspense and climax. He delights to begin vaguely, dropping a dark hint or two, thrusting whatever important he has to say into an aside, from which he hurries to something else, as if he had already told too much; then, perhaps, summarizing the whole thing from the beginning. Some knowledge is required of the reader, but above everything a willingness to engage with the poet in imaginative collaboration.

The modern reader, though not perfectly equipped for it, is yet not destitute of materials for playing the poet's game with him, if he chooses to do so; and, indeed, it is hard to see how he can hold himself entirely absolved from doing so. The process has its obvious perils, for the imagination is in danger of introducing order and precision where the poet was in his own mind confused and vague, and of bringing into the picture elements that are modern and could originally have formed no part of it. There is always the possibility, too, that the poet is not playing quite fair, that he is not dropping enough hints to enable us to follow him with any certainty. But it is still worth a try, since it is possible by means of study to gain in one's appreciation of how the poet puts forth his story, and of what kind of story he likes to tell. With regard to the narrative method of the poet, I hope it is going to be possible to make some observations which will enable us to determine with more security the relation one to another of the statements which go to make up the summary of events in the *Finn Episode*, and to bring out, as has not been done before, the unity of the whole passage. As a result, I hope it is going to be possible to liberate a story, of a sort dear to the poet's heart, which has indeed been more than hinted at by others, but never, I think, quite brought out in its full effectiveness.

We are ready now to listen to the poet. What he offers us is unquestionably a summary;² we do not get the *ipsissima verba* of Hrothgar's *scop*, any more than we do in the case of the earlier song reciting the wonders of creation (90-98). It is of the highest importance to observe that the summary begins with a brief statement of the most significant moment of the whole action—the surprise attack of the Danes upon the Frisians, the crowning act of vengeance in the long, bloody tale (*Finnes eaferan, pā hīe hīe sē fār begeat*, 1068).³ The poet, that is, begins by stating the

² "The exact story to which this episode refers in summary . . .," Gummere, *Oldest English Epic*, p. 69. "A definite specimen of the *scop*'s repertory is exhibited in summary and paraphrase," Klaeber, pp. 547-8. The point is argued at length and convincingly by Lawrence, pp. 397-401.

In an elaborate discussion of *The Opening of the Episode of Finn in Beowulf* (*Pub. Mod. Lang. Ass'n.*, Dec., 1916, 759-797), which reached me long after the present paper had left my hands, Dr. Alexander Green labors to show that what we have is really the *scop*'s lay itself, precisely as he sang it, or, at any rate, as the poet chooses to present him in the act of singing it; that is, the *Beowulf* poet's feeling for the passage would be the same as that for the account of Ingeld (2020 ff.) or the lament for the vanished race (2247 ff.), and not like that for the lament of the woman for the dead Beowulf (3150 ff.) and the other instances discussed in the text where people are *described* as singing or speaking. Upon reflection, I do not find my views altered by his discussion. The *Beowulf*-poet is perfectly competent to handle direct discourse; he introduces it more than two score times, and each time makes his intention abundantly clear. His epic technique provides him with a *convenient* arsenal of "he said" and "she said," and he would hardly in this one instance stay his hand. This would be introducing the big set-piece of the evening with only the casual statement that it was the *scop*'s cue to sing (*mānan scolde*, 1067); "and he did sing, to wit and as follows," the poet would surely have gone on to say, if that had been his conception of the situation. On the other hand, the narrative method of this passage, as I have tried to make plain in the main body of this paper, bears so many resemblances to that of the unquestioned summaries and paraphrases in the poem that I must confess myself unable to see that the Finn episode stands in a class of its own. If it is something more than twice as long as the Sigemund-Heremod paraphrase, if the summary is now rapid, now more at length it should be remembered that the song about Finn occupies a very high and conspicuous position in the architecture of the poem. The whole point, as Dr. Green discusses it, is subordinate to his plea for the retention of the MS reading *eaferum* (1068). But this reading, as he points out (p. 794) may be retained without throwing all that follows into direct discourse: it was the *scop*'s cue to keep the fun going *by means* of the men of Finn and the dire vengeance which the Danes took upon them.

³ Dr. Green (*op. cit.*) urges the retention of the MS *eaferum* (1068) for which as a dative-instrumental of personal agency (earlier scholars had called

outcome of the episode he is summarizing.⁴ The subject announced, we gradually learn what led up to the final destruction of the Frisians. Hnæf, we gather, leader of a party of Danes, has met his death somewhere in the dominions of Finn, king of the Frisians. It is an act of treachery on the part of Finn's people—the old story, no doubt, of a feud, partly healed, breaking out afresh. The tragedy of the situation is poignantly felt by Hildeburg, the queen, who finds herself, like Octavia, "praying for both parts. . . . Husband win, win brother;" for, it appears, she is both wife to Finn and sister to Hnæf. In the exhausting and indecisive battle between the Danes and the thegns of Finn, described presumably in the *Finnsburg Fragment*, the latter lose heavily; at least one son of Hildeburg, beside her brother Hnæf, is among the slain. Unable to dislodge the Danes from their position, Finn finally proposes to take them into his service on terms of absolute equality with his own followers. The Danes, in the person of their new leader Hengest, Hnæf's thegn, consent,

it an instrumental) he finds support in cognate languages, and a few examples in Anglo-Saxon (pp. 769 ff.). Reverting to the view of Bugge and others that *hie* (1068) is anticipatory of *hæleð* (pl.) in the next line, he would translate the opening lines:

By Finn's battle-fighters—when onset befell them,
The heroes of Half-Danes,—Hnæf of the Scyldings
In Frisian slaughter was fated to fall.

The chief difficulty in the way of this interpretation has long been the extreme unlikelihood of any English speaking person then or now so understanding the sentence, until it has been patiently unravelled for him. *Eaferum* as a dative-instrumental one might entertain, though the Anglo-Saxon seems not to have been fond of the construction. But *eaferum* is a long way in advance of its verb and it is walled off from it, as Dr. Green observes, by a "proleptic pleonastic personal pronoun" and such a Mr. Facing-both-ways of a pronoun, which, without making any clear declaration of its intention, seems to incline to *eaferum*, rather than to *hæleð*, as the only clear plural in the neighborhood. The situation is confessedly unpleasant; in this respect it is not by any means unique in the *Beowulf*. Here, as elsewhere, an easy emendation, and in this instance one that has rather striking stylistic appropriateness to recommend it, seems the best way out. Among the proposals *eaferan* (Trautmann, developed by Klaeber, adopted by Holthausen) and [*be*] *Finnes eaferum* (Thorpe advocated afresh by Klaeber, p. 548) do not greatly differ in sense.

⁴ Failure to grasp this crucial point has greatly added to the difficulties of reconstructing the story. Lawrence (pp. 398-9) is, I believe, the first to make it clear.

and with great formality the agreement is ratified and the corpses of the slain committed to the flames.

This much, the setting of the story, is tolerably clear; there is not much room nowadays for difference of opinion.⁵ It is

⁵ Some confusion has resulted from the fact that the poet refers to the opponents of Hnæf and Hengest four times as Frisians and four times as Eotens, (gen. *Eotena*, dat., *Eotenum*), which is possibly, but not certainly, a modification of the name of the Jutes. The unfortunate suggestion that the Eotens are Hnæf's followers need not be considered; it is definitely disposed of by Lawrence, 394, n. 5; 415, n. 2. Most people have thought it necessary to suppose that, whatever ethnological distinctions may once have existed, to the mind of the *Beowulf*-poet Frisians and Eotens were interchangeable terms, exigencies of alliteration and the poet's love of synonymous variety alone determining his choice; *Argeioi*, *Danaoi*, or *Acheioi*, as you choose. Such a conclusion seems to spring naturally from a consideration of ll. 1087 ff.: the Danes, under Hengest, were to have possession of half the hall as against the children of the Eotens (*wið Eotena bearn*, 1088), and Finn was to treat them every day just as generously as he did the kin of the Frisians (*Frēsena cyn*, 1093); if any one of the Frisians (*Frýsna hwylc*, 1104) should twit the Danes with their humiliating position, then—well he would be attended to. How, in such a statement as that, can the *Beowulf*-poet be supposed to intend, or his reader possibly be expected to detect, an ethnological or dramatic distinction between Eotens and Frisians? That the people with whom the Danes were to live, with whom they were to receive equal honor, and from whom they were to expect no uncharitable reminder are to all intents and purposes the same people, seems the only fair and reasonable understanding of the passage. It may be that the poet was consciously using language in a loose fashion, as in a modern newspaper article referring indiscriminately to Germans, Teutons, and Prussians, but it is much more likely that Chambers' remarks on l. 2503 apply here: "But the writer of *Beowulf* may well have been using traditional names which he himself did not clearly understand" (*Beowulf*, p. 125). With regard to the identification, by the *Beowulf*-poet, of Frisians and Eotens, Chambers objects (*Beowulf*, pp. 168-9) that the Eotens being Jutes, they cannot have been Frisians and must therefore have formed a separate, doubtless subordinate, tribe for whose actions Finn, as overlord, was only indirectly responsible. It is the Eotens, he thinks, who start the trouble with the Danes, into which Finn is subsequently drawn in order to avenge the death of his son. Since Finn did not in the first instance betray them, the willingness of the Danes to take service with him is, according to Chambers, more easily accounted for, a point which will be considered in a moment. Nothing quite so elaborate as Chambers' erudite and ingenious hypothesis will, I hope, prove to be necessary. Meanwhile, so far as that hypothesis rests on a supposed distinction between Eotens and Frisians I cannot feel that it has much support. In illustration of the *Beowulf*-poet's method of handling tribal names it may be noted that the opponents of Hygelac on his fatal raid are within a space of ten lines (2912-2921) referred to as Franks, Frisians, *Hugas*, *Hehtware* and *Merewioingas*. Now the Franks are not Frisians and the Hehtware may have been neither, but it is clear that the poet intends no distinction; each time he is referring to the opponents of Hygelac as a whole and is merely availing himself of his prescriptive license, *wordum wrixlan*.

a situation fraught with tragic possibilities. The arrangement made by Hengest on behalf of his Danes was peculiarly disgraceful. To survive his lord was, for a member of the *comitatus*, bad enough; to take service with his lord's *bana*, his murderer either in person or through the agency of one of his henchmen, was a great deal worse. What induced the Danes to accept this humiliating position, the poet does not expressly state, but he implies a great deal which makes it seem natural enough. Winter was at hand, and, as the *Fragment* suggests, there was a good deal of exhaustion on both sides. Finn and his Frisians could not dislodge the Danes from their position nor could he afford to draw off his troops (*wēa-lāf* the *scop* calls them, with pardonable pride in the effectiveness of the Danish resistance) and leave Hengest in possession of the field.⁶ The Danes, on the other hand, could not get to ship and away, for in leaving the hall they lost the advantage of position and faced an inhospitable winter sea. Fought to a standstill, there was nothing for either side to do but to come to terms. Hengest, the shrewd and able retainer, agreed to them, bad as they were in some respects, because he had to (*þā him swā geþearfod wæs*, 1103). The poet is clearly alive to the extreme uncomfortableness of the Danes' situation; this is clearly shown by the detail with which he dwells on the terms of the agreement, according to which the feud is not to be mentioned by the Frisians, or the lordless Danes taunted with following their lord's murderer (1096-1106).⁷ It was not pleasant for the Danes, but since they were not Samurāi (with whom they have many points of resem

⁶ Ll. 1080-85. It is not to be supposed that Hengest, in the midst of Finn's territory, had the Frisian king in his power. In l. 1098 the Danes, also, are referred to as a *wēa-lāf*.

⁷ I take this to mean that the Frisians were not to twit the Danes, just as Leofsunu (*Maldon*, 249 ff.) announced that he had no intention of allowing the warriors to twit him with words because he left the battle lordless (*hlāfordlēas*), and just as Beowulf reproaches Unferth with having survived his brothers in battle (587 ff.). Klaeber's interpretation (*Anglia*, 28, 414; 25, 291) of *þæt* (1099) as "provided that," and *þonne* (1104) as adversative, "on the other hand," is very tempting, implying as it does that not only was there risk that the Frisians might jeer at the Danes but also that the Danes might get to talking their troubles over among themselves and so rouse one another to vengeance. This, according to the view put forward in this paper, is precisely what did happen; note *gemānden* (1101) and *māndon* (1149). But it is not certain that we are justified in thus taking *þæt* . . . *þonne*, and while these grammatical doubts exist I keep to the more obvious rendering.

blance) to take vengeance by committing suicide, there was no other course open to them. Surely, the injunction not to survive one's lord was counsel of perfection; with the best will in the world it couldn't always be managed. The alderman's godson, not to mention the British hostage, survived the feud between Cynewulf and Cyneheard. This, the classical example of loyalty to the ideal, is not altogether on all fours with the feud between Danes and Frisians. For the followers of the dead Cynewulf to take service with Cyneheard was to bestow on him the kingdom of which they were the constituted authorities, if you please, and they may have had all sorts of motives, besides the disinclination to follow their lord's murderer which they chance to avow, for putting down civil war. But the followers of Hnæf had been living as the guests of Finn; there was a drawn battle in which neither side succeeded in exterminating the other; when it had reached this unsatisfactory conclusion the surviving Danes might, of course, have continued on as the guests of Finn, but terms so attractive were not offered to them. They were to go on living with him, for that there was no escape; but they must also, if they expect Finn to support them, become members of his *comitatus*; as they were, they were lordless men. This was hard, but after all, the feud had made commendable progress: the Danish leader was killed and the son of the Frisian leader; both sides were fought out; best cry quits for a while. It is not necessary to suppose that the arrangement between Finn and the Danes was intended to be permanent. Very probably it would terminate with the spring and the surviving Danes would return to their people and take their twitting with what grace they could. It is a gratuitous assumption that Hengest entered the service of Finn with a well-formed plan of revenge; he needs no such defense. If the rest of the story means anything, it indicates clearly that Hengest, though he may have done a deal of thinking, was very slow to make up his mind what he had better do in a difficult situation. And this is precisely what makes him an interesting and tragic figure.⁸ You can blame him if you choose for not getting himself comfortably killed; perhaps he should not have entered upon a disgraceful compact;

⁸ Chambers (*Beowulf*, p. 168) is persuaded that, since it was wrong for the Danes to enter the service of their lord's slayer, they therefore did not do it. Hnæf, he assumes, was not slain by the Frisians, the more immediate subjects of Finn, but by the Eotens, a vassal tribe. But it is hard to see how this helps

but what the poet carefully tells as is that they did patch up matters with Finn and that it *was* a disgraceful thing to do, though something was to be said on their side, but that it all had a most interesting and satisfactory outcome. The story is not over yet; indeed it is just beginning. Let us by all means have the story.

Most unfortunately for our high anticipations, the course of the action from this point is obscure. A carefully considered and intentionally cautious statement of it has recently been made as follows:

At the coming of spring, when travel by sea becomes possible, Hengest, who has been nursing his desire for revenge, sails away. The subsequent events are exceedingly obscure. Apparently Hengest reaches Denmark and brings back reinforcements, and perhaps he is presented by "the son of Hnæf," probably a Dane, with a supremely good sword. It is clear, however, that Finn is slain in his own home, after bitter reproaches have been uttered by Guthlaf and Oslaf. The Danes then plunder Finn's treasures, and sail back to Denmark with this booty and with Queen Hildeburg.⁹

It this is all, is it not a little disappointing? Far from being the story we have waited for, it is hardly a story at all. It may represent the facts as they occurred, but, if this is what really happened, it makes at best a dry chronicle, a thing of patches and loose ends, a rapid-fire of events that hit all around a central tragic situation and do not once touch it. Such is not the usual practise of the *Beowulf*-poet. The tragic situations both of Hildeburg and of Freawaru are keenly present to his mind.¹⁰ A more gracious and pathetic figure than that of Wealtheow is not easily found among the queens of literature, and the tragic irony of her words to Hrothulf (1180-88) is perfectly grasped by the poet. To him the dilemma of Hrethel, father alike of murdered man and of murderer, was a sweet morsel; it yields to him its last drop (2435 ff.). "Mental conflict and tragic contradiction" are of the essence of Northern heroic poetry.¹¹ It is hard to believe that the *scop* and his hearers would not at once light upon Hengest as a tragic

matters. Though the Danes might feel less personal resentment against him as individually guiltless of an act of treachery, nevertheless Finn is technically just as much Hnæf's *bana* in the one case as in the other. And Hnæf's *bana*, in any case, the poet expressly tells us he was (1102).

⁹ Lawrence, pp. 428-9.

¹⁰ Lawrence, pp. 376 ff.

¹¹ Ker, *Epic and Romance*, pp. 65 ff., develops this subject at length; note especially the story of Alboin; also Chamber's *Beowulf*, p. 169.

figure; it is hard to believe that, after so much careful preparation on the part of the poet, he is going to let Hengest receive a sword and then drop tamely out of the story, leaving Guthlaf and Oslaf to do all the talking.¹² Hengest is in an acutely tragic situation; he is personally responsible for putting his followers and himself in the position of living on with the man who had murdered their lord. The conflict of duty is a nice one; torn between his oath to Finn and his duty to the dead Hnæf, with trouble likely to break out among the men at any moment, what are Hengest's emotions, what is he going to do? Here is a complication which demands unravelling. It is a perfect balance, of a sort dear to the temperament and traditions that gave birth to Hamlet. Is there not also, in some sense, a tragedy of Hengest?

It is necessary to return once again to the question of the poet's narrative method. In the *Episode* things are sketched rather than worked out in detail; it is a summary, and not a repetition of the very words that were heard in Heorot. There are several other such summaries in the *Beowulf*, none so long, and they all show the same trick of beginning with a statement of the main point, the outcome, following it with some description of events leading up to it:

884 ff. Sigemund was famous ever after he killed the worm; he did it all alone; he killed the worm; he carried off the treasure.

901 ff. Heremod grew slack and cruel and was banished among the Eotens—that is the point; the reasons follow: he had a hard time when he was young and people wished him back on the throne of his father's: once there he behaved badly.

1931 ff. As for Queen Thryth, no one dared look her in the eye except her husband; he cured her of her tricks—then the ale-drinkers go on to tell the story.

In similar fashion the *Episode* opens with a statement of the outcome, of the surprise attack of the Danes upon Finn and his Frisians, in revenge for the earlier treachery of Finn's people against the Danes resulting in the death of Huæf. We may expect, then, in the *Episode*, to judge from the manner of these summaries generally, frequent use of what Heinzel called the BAB method,¹³

¹² *Anzeiger für deutsches Alterthum und deutsche Literatur*, X, 220 ff.

¹³ One is reminded of Cervantes satire on this Damoclean kind of suspense at the end of the first book of *Don Quixote*.

hysteron-proteron, that is, on a large scale. We shall not expect to be held in suspense, as we are through some hundred lines of narrative before we learn exactly what happened to Grendel (833 ff.), or when Beowulf lifts his sword in l. 1573 b with what effect we do not become certain until we reach l. 1590. We shall not expect mere general hints as to the outcome; we shall look rather to be told explicitly of an event and then hear what came before it; then, perhaps, some more about the event, and, possibly, more of what lead up to it.

With this in mind let us return to Hengest, whom we left the victim of a pretty conflict of emotion. How did he feel during that long, blood-stained winter? He naturally thought about home (*eard gemunde*, 1129), but there was no question of sailing then, no need yet of decision while the storm roared outside.¹⁴ By and by spring came round, as it has a way of doing. How did he feel then? Then, like any other Northerner, he wanted to put to sea.¹⁵

1137

fundode wrecca,

gist of gearдум [;].

That is what he would naturally do. He would speak to Finn and be off; in the spring his business was on the sea.¹⁶ That is all right as to Finn, but as to the dead Hnæf it is very like running away; it is postponing vengeance sadly. Will he prove so unpregnant of his cause as that? No; though he would like to go to sea, he thought *rather* of vengeance and staid in the hope of managing a successful surprise against Finn and his people:

¹⁴ Reading, *þeah-þe hē [ne] meahte*, 1130.

¹⁵ *Fundian* is of course ambiguous as to whether he went or merely desired to go. The only other occurrence of the word in *Beowulf* has the latter sense.

¹⁶ The *Seafarer* affords a good commentary on this. A quotation from the saga of *Burnt Njal* (Everyman's Library, p. 10) is in point: "Hrut stayed with the king that winter in good cheer, but when spring came he grew very silent. . . . Hrut went before the king and bade him 'Good-day'; and the king said, 'What dost thou want now, Hrut?'"

'I am come to ask, lord, that you give me leave to go to Iceland.'

'Will thine honour be greater there than here?' asks the king.

'No, it will not,' said Hrut, 'but every man must win the work that is set before him.' "

¹⁸ The genealogy in Arngrim Jonsson's Latin abstract of the *Skjoldunga Saga*, which includes the names of Hunleifus, Oddleifus, and Gunleifus among the seven sons of an otherwise unknown Danish king Leifus, affords support to the already plausible supposition that Hunlafing was a Dane (Chadwick, *Origin of the English Nation*, p. 52). But this welcome piece of information by no means proves that to the *Beowulf*-poet Hunlafing and his uncles Guðlaf and Oslaf [Ordlaſ] are necessarily princes and not retainers of Hnæf, at whose death they follow the leadership of Hengest. Guðlaf and Oslaf [Ordlaſ] fight side by side with *Hengest sylf* in the first fight (*Fragment*, 18 f.), and there is nothing to suggest that they, as well as the son of the brother Hunlaf, were not members of the Danish party throughout the whole affair. It is probable that Hunlaf himself fell in the first fight, hence his son's desire to spur Hengest on to vengeance.

of the treacherous attack in the hall; the implication is that it was destined to do so again:

- 1143 þonne him Hūnlāfing hilde-lēoman,
 billa selest, on bearm dyde;
 þæs wāron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe.

Suppose, now, the son of Hunlaf offered the sword to Hengest with egging words similar to those of the *eald æsc-wiga* in Beowulf's account of the Ingeld-Freawaru episode:

- 2047 Meaht þū, mīn wine, mēce gecnāwan..[?]¹⁹

Such a hint would do much to teach Hengest his course and the poet hastens to assure us that he did in the end sweep on to his revenge. Just as the people of Finn had earlier fallen before this famous sword, and by implication were destined to do so again, so likewise (*swylce*) Finn was slain in his own house:

- 1146 Swylce ferhð-frecan Fin eft begeat
 sweord-bealo slīðen æt his selves hām [;].

But to go back for a moment, as I believe our study of the narrative method leads us to be ready to do to some of the occasions of this fortunate event. Hengest's almost blunted purpose was not whetted by Hunlafing alone. The latter's uncles, Guðlaf and Oslaf [Ordlaf] took occasion to mention to Hengest the fierce attack (the one, presumably, in which Hnæf had fallen); cast up to him all the troubles that had befallen them ever since their disastrous sea-journey to Finnsburg;²⁰ they had plenty of woes to twit him with:

- 1148 siððan grimne gripe Guðlaf and Oslaf
 æfter sǣ-siðe sorge mǣndon,
 æt witon wēana dæl [;].

The effect of all this on Hengest is cumulative. Where he was before in perfect balance, he is now wrought to action by the

¹⁹ Compare this whole passage and the corresponding account in Saxo, Bk. VI, especially pp. 250 ff., in Elton's translation.

²⁰ There seems to be no necessity for assuming that the *ǣs-sið* refers to anything but his original journey, which was evidently by sea since Hengest wished to return that way and eventually did so. It is possible that the poet was thinking also of a sea-journey, if there was one, from Finnsburg to the high-city of Finn (see note 22). There may also be some causative implication in *æfter*. The warriors are twitting Hengest with all the troubles that have befallen them since they left home, with everything that has happened to them on account of their ill-starred expedition.

words of his followers; he can control himself no longer; the balance is destroyed. The restless spirit (Hengest's in the first instance, but it may be thought of as referring to the entire attacking party, now of one mind) could no longer restrain itself within the breast:

1150 ne meahte wæfre mōd
forhabban in hreðre.

Vengeance wins the day. The surprise attack (*fēor*, 1068) is successfully carried through upon the immediate followers of Finn; Finn himself, we are reminded once more, was slain (1152); and the Danes make their escape with enormous booty and the queen's person:²¹

1151	þa wæs heal roden	
fēonda fēorum,	swilce Fin slægen,	
cynning on corðre,	ond sēo cwēn numen.	
Scēotend Scyldinga	tō scypon feredon	
eal in-gesteald	eorð-cyninges,	
swylce hīe æt Finnes hām	findan meahton	
sigla searo-gimma,	Hīe on sǣ-lāde	
drihtlice wif	tō Denum feredon,	
læddon tō lēodum.		

"Hushed is the harp—the minstrel gone." And his song was, I feel constrained to think, worthy of the occasion that called it forth. So far as we have been able to follow him, he seems to have sung a striking and well-knit song of *Hengest sylf*. It was a song of a kind to appeal to the *Beowulf*-poet, who has reported it in highly characteristic fashion. It is not to be supposed that it has been left for me at this time of day to do more than to sharpen some of the features of what may be called the vulgate reading of the story. But in some respects the current version was very unsatisfactory; there seemed to be little relation between the

²¹ There is no reason to think that Finn's *corðer* greatly outnumbered the Danes; the element of surprise would outweigh what advantage there might be. Besides, it is quite possible to interpret ll. 1125-27, as Binz and Klaeber do, to mean that a considerable number of Finn's warriors returned to their homes after the first fight; Lawrence, p. 401. The completeness of the Danes' vengeance is of course not diminished in the telling. But whether the first fight took place at Finn's capital, where the surviving Danes continued to reside with him, or at some provincial stronghold of his, from which they journeyed to the capital (1125 ff.), I feel very uncertain. There is a good deal to be said for the second alternative, which is the usual view.

presentation of the sword to Hengest and the spectacle of Guðlaf and Oslaf howling their complaints in the face of Finn. In place of this scattering chronicle we have now the tragedy of Hengest; beginning with a detailed description of his *suasoria*, with his tragic dilemma, the story keeps Hengest before us to the end, his indecision played upon *both* by Hunlafing *and* by Guðlaf and Oslaf, until he rises up and smites Finn in his own house. This at any rate comes nearer to the sort of story we had every reason to expect from the *scop* than anything his commentators have hitherto credited him with.

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